Four years ago almost all of the applauded and selling art was "New York School" painting. It was preponderant in most galleries, which were uninclined to show anything new. The publications which praised it praised it indiscriminately and were uninterested in new developments. Much of the painting was by the "second generation," many of them epigones. Pollock was dead. Kline and Brooks had painted their last good paintings in 1956 and 1957. Guston's paintings had become soft and gray – his best ones are those around 1954 and 1955. Motherwell's and de Kooning's paintings were somewhat vague. None of these artists were criticized. In 1959 Newman's work was all right, and Rothko's was even better than before. Presumably, though none were shown in New York, Clyfford Still's paintings were all right. This lackadaisical situation was thought perfect. The lesser lights and some of their admirers were incongruously dogmatic: this painting was not doing well but was the only art for the time. They thought it was a style. By now, it is. This painting, failed or failing in various ways, overshadowed or excluded everything else.

Actually, unregarded, quite a bit was happening. Rauschenberg had been doing what he does since 1954. Public opinion, which is a pretty unhandy thing to attribute opinions to, granted him talent but also thought his work fairly irrelevant, something of an aberrant art. Rauschenberg is somewhat overpraised now, but he was underpraised then. Jasper Johns had already finished his flags and targets in 1959. The interest in them still seems the first public fissure in the orthodoxy. George Ortman was doing his best reliefs and had been working along that line for some time. Their worth has never been adequately acknowledged. Ad Reinhardt had developed his black paintings around 1955 and was gradually developing them further. They were some of the best and most original paintings being done, and by 1959 they were better than most of those being made by the decelerating Expressionists. One got the impression, though, that they

weren't much compared to the latest work by Michael Goldberg or Grace Hartigan; and anyway, anything more or less geometric was thought a dead end. Josef Albers's paintings had recently become very good. Quite a few artists, well known now, such as Bontecou, Chamberlain, and Jensen, had a good start on their present work. More – Oldenburg, for example – had made a beginning.

In 1960 there were several unpredicted shows, and things began to be complicated again. In another year, the opinions of the New York School, which had constituted general public opinion in 1959, contracted to just the opinions of the New York School. Some of the shows which progressively changed the situation, either through an advance or simply a change, were Yayoi Kusama's exhibition of white paintings at the Brata in October 1959; Noland's exhibition at French & Company that October; Al Jensen's paintings at Jackson in November 1959; Chamberlain's sculpture at Jackson in January 1960; Edward Higgins's sculpture at Castelli in May 1960; Mark di Suvero's enormous sculpture at Green in October 1960; Frank Stella's aluminum-colored paintings at Castelli that October (universally absurdly reviewed); Lee Bontecou's reliefs at Castelli in November 1960. Oldenburg opened his *Store* in December 1961; Rosenquist showed at Green, and Lichtenstein at Castelli, in February 1962. With these, and of course other shows, things were wide-open again – as they were, though with less people, in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Right now, things are fairly closed for Abstract Expressionism; that's an exception to the openness. There is a vague, pervasive assumption, like that about geometric art around 1959, that Abstract Expressionism is dead, that nothing new is to be expected from its original practitioners and that nothing will be developed from it, nothing that would be identifiable as deriving from it and that would also be new. It sure looks dead. Frankenthaler is about the only one not showing weak and boring paintings. A lot of the artists and some of their

favorite reviewers feel persecuted. It is very obvious, though, that Abstract Expressionism and Impressionism just collapsed. Brooks, de Kooning, Guston, and Motherwell are adding poor paintings to their earlier good ones, and the loss of the good ones they aren't painting is a major loss for American art. It is also a loss that the younger and secondary ones haven't improved or even stayed even. Joan Mitchell's work, for example, should have improved. So should that of Grillo, Francis, Pace, Dugmore, and McNeil. Briggs and Leslie should not have declined and should be better. They had, in contrast to Goldberg and Hartigan, for instance, enough ability to imply improvement.

The ordinary chances of art history make it unlikely, though, that this kind of painting will remain moribund. As a general style – in itself death – it will stay dead, but the chances are good that a few of the artists will revive. It is easy to imagine de Kooning going strong again or Joan Mitchell improving. It is likely that someone will derive something new from Abstract Expressionism. If Ellsworth Kelly can do something novel with a geometric art more or less from the 1930s, or Rauschenberg with Schwitters and found objects generally – which is a twenty-year jump or more – then someone is going to do something surprising with Abstract Expressionism, with loose paintings.

It isn't necessary for artists who were once fairly original and current to abandon their first way of working in favor of a new way. The degree of their originality determines whether they should use a new situation or not. This, of course, is the complicated problem of artistic progress. A new form of art usually appears more logical, expressive, free, and strong than the form it succeeds. There is a kind of necessity and coherent, progressive continuity to changes in art. It makes sense now to call the shallow depth of Abstract Expressionism old-fashioned. The statement, though, is a criticism only in regard to art developing with or after the art, such as Frank Stella's unspatial

aluminum paintings, which made Abstract Expressionism appear less coherent and expressive than possible. It is pretty obvious that a lot of art has become strong and lucid after the point at which it was the most advanced way of thinking. Stuart Davis's paintings, for instance, became much better after 1945. Also, incidentally, the dry, hot quality of the surface and the color and the kind of shapes and other things have probably exerted a steady influence. The paintings are good and have been around for quite a while, and Davis is still doing them. This has a quiet effect, unlike the abrupt changes that have been influential. Albers's work has been quietly influential too, and probably Calder's, Avery's, and maybe Hopper's as well. Although it is true that one form may be better, more advanced, than another, it is also true that art isn't so neat as to be simply linear. There isn't even one line anyway, since the kinds of art are so various.

At any time there is always someone trying to organize the current situation. Some of the troubles afflicting Abstract Expressionism come from that effort. Calling diverse work "Abstract Expressionism" or any of its other labels was an attempt to make a style, at least a category. "Crisis," "revolutionary," and the like were similar attempts to simplify the situation, but through its historical location instead of its nature. The prevailing notion of style comes from the European tradition, where it is supposed to be variations within a general appearance, which a number of artists, a "school," supposedly even a period, may share. (Actually things weren't that simple then, either.) Obviously, Abstract Expressionism wasn't a style. It certainly had a few common characteristics, especially the shallow and frontal depth and the relatively single scheme, a field or simple forms, but these certainly did not have a common appearance. The artists were responsible for eventually making it all look pretty much alike, but the writing about it, which failed to differentiate it sufficiently, helped this along. The failure to criticize and evaluate

the various artists was even more serious. A "first generation" justifies a "second generation." That could happen only through an idea of a style, but the growth of a style wasn't what was happening. The epigonous role of the "second generation" should have been stressed rather than its role as the inheritor of the "first generation." One should be skeptical about followers. (There is also the funny practice of using the fact of numerous followers to prove the importance of the leaders.) The bandwagon nature of art in New York also comes out of the urge to make categories and movements. The bandwagon entails a simpleminded acceptance of everything in the lauded category – as happened with Abstract Expressionism – and a simpleminded rejection of everything else. Pop art is discussed and shown in this way, too – leave it alone.

The history of art and art's condition at any time are pretty messy. They should stay that way. One can think about them as much as one likes, but they won't become neater; neatness isn't even a very good reason for thinking about them. A lot of things just can't be connected. The several complaints of confusion, lack of common goals, uncertainty, and rapid change are naive. Like style, they are meaningless now. Things can only be diverse and should be diverse. Styles, schools, common goals, and long-term stability are not credible ideas. And the idea of Pop art as the successor to Abstract Expressionism is ridiculous.

The change from the relatively uniform situation of 1959 to the present diverse one did not suddenly occur with Pop art in the 1961–62 season. The list of exhibitions a while back shows that it didn't. The change certainly wasn't from one movement to the next. A lot of new artists were already showing. Almost all of them had developed their work as simply their own work. There were almost no groups and there were no movements. The few groups were hardly groups, being only two or three artists rather distantly influencing one

another, such as Noland, Louis, and, as it turns out, Gene Davis, all working in Washington. It is one of the famous facts of Pop art that most of the artists were unaware of one another. But that fact has been turned to prove the grassrootedness of the so-called Movement. Obviously movements are handy for publicity, as the accidents of inclusion and exclusion show, but the more serious need for them seems again to lie in the similarity of earlier art. This art, though, came from fairly small, close, and coercive societies. Belief and disbelief are much changed. Another point about the present period is that it is not a decline from Abstract Expressionism; it is not an interregnum; it does not have inferior art. Although the present does not have anyone of Pollock's profundity – too many of the artists are too young – there are more good artists. The amount of good work is amazing. There is plenty of mediocre art, but there always is. Another point is that Abstract Expressionist qualities and schemes have had a large influence on most of the new artists. The inventions of the several artists have not been opposed; usually they have been strengthened. The paramount quality and scheme of Abstract Expressionism was the singleness of the format and so of the quality. The more unique and personal aspects of art, which had been subservient before, were stated alone, large and singly. This was developed further by almost all of the new artists. The supposed "second generation," in contrast, weakened this quality, most often with archaic composition and naturalistic color.

Three-dimensional work, approximating objects, and more or less geometric formats with color and optical phenomena are a couple of the wider categories of new and interesting work. These categories are categories only by the common presence of a single very general aspect. A person could select other common elements which would make other groups. The proportion of things not in common far exceeds the things that are. The things in common are, again, very general and unspecific. They certainly don't form a style.

They occur in contradictory or unrelated contexts. Pop art subject matter is new of course, and interesting, but since it has been used carelessly to lump the various artists together, it is better for the time being to mention aspects which split up Pop. Roy Lichtenstein and John Wesley, for example, have something in common in their metavisual schemes; none of the other Pop artists are involved. That Oldenburg's pieces are objects differentiates them from Rosenquist's paintings, for instance, more than the relation of subject matter joins them. And anyway the two kinds of subject matter are very different. Wide-open, constructed, more or less composed sculpture is becoming a crowded category. Mark di Suvero and Chuck Ginnever originated it. This does approach a real category, almost a style, having a particular reference to nature, defined by Kline's paintings, and a general similarity of appearance. However the resemblance came about, and it has been increasing rather than decreasing, the sculpture suffers. Yet, most of the artists working in this way, Tony Magar and Tom Doyle, for instance, are accomplished. These divisions, as wide as they are, certainly don't comprise everything being done in New York.

Many more people painted paintings than made sculptures a few years ago. Also, painting was the more advanced form. Now sculpture is becoming dominant. It isn't often sculpture though, in the sense that a material is sculpted. Quite a few painters, of course, are more unusual than a lot of the sculptors. The most unusual part of three-dimensional work is that which approaches "being an object." The singleness of objects is related to the singleness of the best paintings of the early 1950s. Like the paintings, such work is unusually distinct and intense. Generally it has fewer of the devices of earlier art and more of its own.

A few of Rauschenberg's pieces are more or less objects: the goat with the tire, the box with the chicken, and the dolly with the ventilator. The first two have a good deal of compositional painting, but it is fairly adventitious to the few parts,

which are composed simply enough to appear at first only juxtaposed. The ventilator is pretty bare. The objectness of these things is obviously that of real objects in simple combinations. Some of George Ortman's reliefs are three-dimensional enough to be objects. They seem to be games or models for some activity and suggest chance, from much through little, controlled and uncontrolled, operating on things both related and unrelated. They suggest probability theory. They are one of the few instances of completely unnaturalistic art. They are concerned with a new area of experience, one which is relevant philosophically as well as emotionally. All of H. C. Westermann's works are objects. In pieces like *A Rope Tree* and a marbled question mark, Westermann also has something new and philosophical. The enlargement and purposeful construction of the twist of rope and the punctuation mark emphasize, though problematically, their identities and so suggest the strangeness of the identity of anything. The power of Lee Bontecou's reliefs is caused by their being objects. The reliefs are a single image. The structure and the total shape are coincident with the image. The bellicose detail and the formidable holes are experienced as one would experience a minatory object. The quality of the reliefs is exceptionally explicit or specific or single and obsessive. The quality of John Chamberlain's sculpture, in contrast, involves a three-way polarity of appearance and meaning, successive states of the same form and material. A piece may appear neutral, just junk, casually objective; or redundant, voluminous beyond its structure, obscured by other chances and possibilities; or simply expressive, through its structure and details and oblique imagery. The appearance of a mass of colored automobile metal is obviously essential.

Frank Stella says that he is doing paintings, and his work could be considered as painting. Most of the works, though, suggest slabs, since they project more than usual, and since some are notched and some are shaped like letters. Some new

ones, painted purple, are triangles and hexagons with the centers open. The notches in the aluminum paintings determine the patterns of the stripes within. The projection, the absence of spatial effects, and the close relation between the periphery and the stripes make the paintings seem like objects, and that does a lot to cause their amplified intensity. Oldenburg's objects involve an analogy between psychological, erotic, and otherwise profound forms, on the one hand, and pieces of food and clothing on the other. The two kinds of form are coextensive, but with different references. Most of Lucas Samaras's works are objects. These are opened books completely covered with pins, points out; glasses flanged with razor blades and filled with bits of reliquiae; a small chest covered with a spiral of colored yarn into which pins are stuck; and other hermetic, defended, offending objects. John Anderson's sculptures are carved from wood and suggest large implements out of the West. The large parts are the expressive ones; there is little subsidiary composition. The wholeness of a piece is primary, is experienced first and directly. It is not something understood through the contemplation of parts. The figures by Ed Kienholz are also objects in a way, not represented but existing on their own. The color, for example, is in the various materials and so exists casually and independently. George Segal's plaster figures are life-size and are usually accompanied by some piece of furniture. They seem both dead and alive, and the specificity of both aspects comes from the real space they occupy, their real size, their real appearance, their artificial material, and the real furniture.

Sven Lukin, Ronald Bladen, and Scarpitta make reliefs which approach being objects. Dan Flavin has shown some boxes with lights attached. These hang on a wall. Richard Navin exhibited some open pieces, rather like racks for internal organs. Yayoi Kusama has done a couch, a chair, and a boat obsessively covered with erect bags painted white. Robert Watts has cast pencils, suckers, and other objects in aluminum.

Arakawa exhibited coffins holding surreal devilfish. George Brecht, in extreme understatement, just exhibits something, in one case a blue stool upon which a white glove is lying. Robert Morris exhibited a gray column, a gray slab, and a suspended gray slab, all also understated. Other pieces of his produce an idea. Yoshimura does tough columns and boxes set with plaster hemispheres and shapes cast from jello molds. Nathan Raisen makes compact reliefs of columnar forms, symmetrical, sometimes intersecting, usually black and white and occasionally with sienna. John Willenbecher does black-and-gray shallow boxes, hung as reliefs, with gold letters, concavities, and balls.

Most of the best painting has gotten to the point where it is nearly flat and nearly without illusionistic space. The majority of Al Jensen's paintings are completely flat. They depend entirely on the texture, the color, and the complex patterning. Noland's paintings have a little space. The positions and the colors of the bands, the centered scheme, and the flatness of the unprimed canvas reduce the depth of the space considerably; there is less space than in Rothko's or Pollock's paintings. Most of Frank Stella's paintings are nearly flat. Olitski's and Gene Davis's paintings have the minimal amount that Noland's have. Albers and Reinhardt, having formed their work earlier, have somewhat more space, especially Albers. The most illusionistic of the best painting generally is the work by Lichtenstein, Wesley, and especially Rosenquist – since they deal with subject matter. Lichtenstein's and Wesley's paintings, being imitations, are not spatial in the same way as Rosenquist's. Because of this flatness, because it is restrictive (in another way it is unrestrictive), and because the apparent alternative of space has been rejected in arriving at the flatness, there is a need for something complicated and ambiguous but, unlike imitated space, actual and definite. Color and optical phenomena have this character. They have been used to some extent all along in modern painting, but never in the scale

and with the simplicity that they possess now. Albers's teaching and work have undoubtedly made color and optical phenomena familiar. However, his use of these is very different from their use by the younger painters.

When Stella's concentric lines change direction the extent of the area around them changes. The rows of angles make ambiguous, lively bands across the fairly impassive fields of parallel lines. Stella also uses value sequences and groups of colors. Larry Poons paints polka dots on stained grounds, maroon in one case, yellow ocher in another. The small circles on the maroon are light blue and a medium red. The circles produce an afterimage alongside themselves. This is both definite and transitory. The spacing of the polka dots is interesting, being sparse and somewhat casual and accidental, and yet seemingly controlled by some plan. The whole pattern of afterimages is another effect. Neil Williams paints fields of slanted, round-cornered parallelograms. These alternate with a ground, each row being staggered in regard to the rows above and below it. The parallelograms usually don't quite touch, so that the ground is tenuously linked, though it becomes equivalent or even reversed. The fields tend to flow vertically, horizontally, or diagonally, depending on which effect one looks at. The emphasis varies with each painting. One painting has parallelograms of somewhat lightened ultramarine blue on what appears to be plain white, but is really white tinted with orange. The tint reinforces the afterimages of the blue oblongs, producing an orange glow after a while. Ad Reinhardt, of course, has made a great thing of close value. He has separated value and color. The paintings seem black at first, and then they divide into a few colors. They are unified through a single value, made absolute and negative, or absolutely negative, and are disunited through several colors, and thus made changeable and ambiguous. Incidentally, Reinhardt's following Poons and Williams here doesn't mean that he shares their fairly direct relationship to the Abstract Expressionists. Also, pigeonholing

Reinhardt under optical phenomena only shows how arbitrary pigeonholes are.

The two categories, objects and optical art, have been made from what is happening, are due to the two things selected, and are far from being all of what is happening – and are hardly definitive. A whole new category could be made by connecting artists whose work expresses some of the concerns of more or less contemporary philosophy, such as Ortman and Westermann. Jasper Johns to some extent and Lichtenstein and Wesley do work that suggests comment on the comment of metalinguistics. These are all categories after the fact, ones for discussion; they are not enclosing working categories.

(Images 13–31)

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